

LENTEN SERIES

Topic: Renewal Christianity: 2,000 Years of Christianity

Presenter: Prof. Christopher M. Bellitto, PhD

Facilitator: Fr. Joseph Domfeh, J.C.L., PhD

Morning Session: 9:30-10:30

Evening Session: 7:30-8:30

Church Meeting Room

- March 2, 2020:** History of the History of Reform.
Reform and Renewal: Words, Ideas, and Principles.
- March 9, 2020:** Greek and Latin Fathers: Personal Reform.
Early Monks and Nuns: Personal Reform under a Rule.
- March 16, 2020:** Medieval Reform Councils. Religious Orders: A Variety of
Reform and Renewal Practices.
- March 23, 2020:** Protestant Reformation I.
Protestant Reformation II.
- March 30, 2020:** Catholic Reformation: Between Trent and Vatican Council II.
- April 13, 2020:** Vatican Council I. Implementing and interpreting
Vatican Council II.
- April 20, 2020:** Three lessons from the History of Reform and Renewal.
Three more lessons from the History of Reform and Renewal.

Catholic

UPDATE

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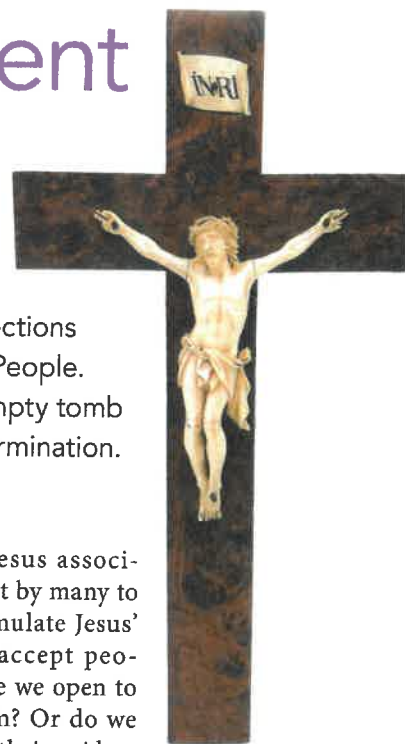
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MARCH 2020

Day by Day Through Lent

JOURNEY OF LOVE AND REDEMPTION

DIANNE BERGANT, CSA



Lent is a time to consider God's graciousness despite our sins. These reflections show this goodness evident at various times in the history of the Chosen People. Easter proclaims the fact of eschatological fulfillment that began at the empty tomb and continues with us. Easter is a season of joy, hope, gratitude, and determination.

Ash Wednesday

Accept God's Invitation "Return to [God] with your whole heart" from Joel 2:12-13 sets the tone for Lent. We are encouraged to reform our lives not out of fear of punishment but because we know we must restore our faithfulness to God, who is "merciful" and abounds "in steadfast love."

THURSDAY

Choices Moses' advice to the Israelites to "choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19) and Jesus' admonition on the conditions of discipleship (Luke 9:23) speak of choice. The Israelites, on the threshold of the land of promise, must decide how they will live in that land; Jesus tells us to take up our cross. When we follow Jesus' example and stand against negativity, we are choosing the reign of God.

FRIDAY

Embracing Sacrifice Isaiah 58:6-7 advocates performing the corporal works of mercy. The prophets often directed people to act as they believed God had acted toward them: tenderly and with understanding. Fasting might remind us of our weaknesses and need of reparation. Generosity reminds us of God's goodness. Jesus tells his disciples to know when to fast. Follow his advice.

SATURDAY

Open Your Heart Jesus associated with people thought by many to be unworthy. Do we emulate Jesus' graciousness? Do we accept people no matter what? Are we open to opportunities to reform? Or do we judge people because of their evident unworthiness and others because of their goodwill? Which choices will we make this Lent?

First Sunday of Lent

Escape the Trap Not satisfied to be humble humans, Adam and Eve desired to be like gods, "knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:22). This is the universal and perennial sin. While sinfulness cannot be denied, God's grace is superior. Jesus resists temptation. His example should strengthen our own resistance. All fail, but Jesus remains faithful. Follow the perfect model.

MONDAY

Draw Closer Moses tells the Israelites to deal with each other with honesty, patience, and acceptance (Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18). Jesus instructs his disciples similarly (Matthew 25:31-46). Lent, a time of penitence, is a chance to commit to the kind of penance that makes a difference. The works of mercy often call for great self-sacrifice. When we perform them, we lead the world and ourselves closer to holiness.

Third Sunday of Lent

Dive Deeply The woman at the well is promised water with properties far beyond her imagining (John 4:4–42). This woman was thirsty for insight. We have wonderful Lenten opportunities to look deeply into our own hearts. Do we take God's benevolence for granted? Or are we like the Samaritan woman, open to conversion of mind and heart, and to opportunities to bring others to Jesus?

MONDAY

Heed to Humility Naaman does not belong to the people of Israel, yet the healing power of God goes out to him. This shows that the embrace of divine love encompasses all. In Luke 4:24–30, Jesus refers to this story to say the outsider is included in God's circle of care, and sometimes those in the inner circle exclude themselves with overconfidence. During Lent, examine the extent and character of our own openness.

TUESDAY

Forgive Freely Jesus said forgiveness must be open-ended, immeasurable, and always available: "not seven times but seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18:22). We must be willing to forgive just as we have been forgiven. Jesus' story in Matthew 18 depicts a person in great debt who is forgiven his own debt but is unwilling to forgive the lesser debt of another. Lent places the forgiving Jesus before us as a model to follow.

WEDNESDAY

Rejoice in God's Law Many have a negative attitude toward the law, finding it restrictive and a threat to freedom. That's far from the way ancient Israel perceived their Law (Deuteronomy 4:6). Scripture underscores the importance of teaching God's laws to others. During Lent, as new catechumens are being instructed in the faith, it's a good time for us to reflect on our attitude toward the laws that direct our lives.

THURSDAY

Allied with Good The Gospels frequently portray Jesus in combat with a demon. These stories show how he sought to get rid of evil. Our world is rife with hatred, violence, and injustice. Do we fight it, as Jesus did? Or do we

refrain from thinking that it concerns us and simply walk away?

FRIDAY

Learn to Love A scribe asks Jesus, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" (Mark 12:28–34). Jesus names: love of God and love of others as oneself. We express our love for God in the ways we love one another. The scribe testifies that love of others "is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices" (v. 33). Jesus replies: "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (v. 34).

SATURDAY

Act in Humility In the narrative about a righteous tax collector and a self-righteous Pharisee, the Pharisee contrasts his external observance with the unacceptable livelihood of the other, judging himself as righteous. The tax collector acknowledges his sin and pleads for mercy. Jesus declares: "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11).

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Sight Check In the story of the blind man, who is really blind? The religious leaders won't see the obvious: A blind man now sees. The man's parents acknowledge his healing but lack the insight to accept this marvel as coming from God. Only the man who initially could not see possesses sight and faith (John 9:1–41). We should ask: Am I blind, or can I see?

MONDAY

Trust in God's Word In John's Gospel, a royal official comes to Jesus. This prominent man pleads with him not for himself but for his child. His manner reveals a humble and unselfish spirit (John 4:43–54). The promises in the Bible are intended for us. We are called to believe that God's word will accomplish in us what has been promised.

TUESDAY

Prepare for Renewal The Bible describes water flowing from the temple as a life-giving force, encouraging the burgeoning of living creatures (Ezekiel 47:1–9, 12). Water also plays a significant role in our Lenten observance.

At the season's end, catechumens are plunged into the waters of baptism to emerge as new creations. We, too, renew our baptismal promises and are sprinkled with water to remind us of our own second birth.

WEDNESDAY

Answer the Call In Isaiah 49:8–15, we see both hope and comfort. Many among us need the same. Who will address the sense of defeat that often accompanies unemployment, homelessness, or the anxiety of parents whose children are imprisoned by addiction? Surely the prophet's message is for these who suffer as well. Who will walk with them through the darkness? Perhaps we are called to this Lenten observance.

THURSDAY

Lead in Selflessness God and Moses' exchange after the people's betrayal and worship of the calf is noteworthy (Exodus 32). Moses rejects the possibility of himself being made the source of a great nation, but he pleads the cause of the ungrateful people he leads. What kind of leaders are we? What would we be willing to sacrifice for the well-being of those for whom we are responsible?

FRIDAY

Refine Perceptions The Gospels show that Jesus did not fit the popular image of a messiah. Sometimes we demand that goodness fit our standards or we will not accept it. We may ridicule or persecute it. If we reflect on the passion of Jesus, can we be sure that we would have embraced the goodness he manifested, especially if it challenged our own perception of goodness?

SATURDAY

Observe Wisely We may think that associating with those individuals who possess a form of public status will enhance our own importance. But a person's potential springs from within, not from his or her place of origin or societal status. The people of Jesus' time knew he was the One by listening to him and observing his behavior. That's also how we are to know him today.

TUESDAY

Pray with Heart In the Our Father, we address God as the source of our life. We remember our own selfless endeavors help establish the reign we yearn for. Then we pray for our needs and ask for forgiveness, which God gives us freely. God demands we forgive, too. Finally, we pray for perseverance, knowing our best intentions are easily compromised.

WEDNESDAY

Reconcile Readily Jonah's story shows it can be difficult to rejoice in the good fortune of those we consider our enemies. Jonah wanted the Ninevites to suffer for their hostility toward him and his people and their rejection of God. Instead, God extended divine mercy. The Ninevites accepted it and reconciled with God. Reflect on the Ninevites' penitence, which demonstrates God's mercy to all, a powerful example.

THURSDAY

Be Authentic Jesus says a parent's unselfish affection toward his children assures us of God's deep love (Matthew 7:7–12). We trusting children should turn to God in prayer. The passage in Matthew ends: "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you." Within the context of Jesus' teaching about God's generosity, it can be seen as "the golden rule." God's goodness toward us should be the motivation of our own kindness toward others.

FRIDAY

Develop Deeper Love While perhaps unfair, others often bear the consequences of the misdeeds of a guilty few. Jesus affirms that forgiveness will be bestowed upon those who repent and reform their lives (Matthew 5:20–26). Thus, righteous living moves from communal liability to personal accountability. Develop personal responsibility—an admirable Lenten practice.

SATURDAY

Thwart the Threat *Téleios*, Greek for "perfect," means whole, complete, or undivided. Surely this implies openness to all. It can be easy to love people close to us because they are like us. The differences of "others" tend to threaten us, so we erect barriers as protection. Grasp the merit in differences by thwarting the threat. Heed the summons to love as God loves: perfectly.

Second Sunday of Lent

Trust Completely God doesn't specify what a call to holy life might entail. Abram did not know how God would fulfill his promise of a multitude of descendants and an enviable reputation (Genesis 12:1–4). Like Abram, we may find it difficult to trust. However, in Jesus' transfiguration, God's voice directs us: "Listen to him" (Luke 9:35). Trust in God. Trust in Jesus.

MONDAY

Move Beyond Empathy God's compassion can be compared to the intimate attachment a mother has for her unborn child. Compassion is also a characteristic of covenant love. Divine compassion is more than human empathy. It is shown to all, even those who disregard their covenant commitment. The compassion we have known from God is the measure of the compassion we should show others.

TUESDAY

Practice Mercy Isaiah 1:17 presents a Lenten program based on the works of mercy: "Make justice your aim...." Be fair. Don't take advantage of the vulnerable. "Redress the wronged...." Strive to overturn unfair practices. "Hear the orphan's plea...." Help ones who have had loss due to war, natural disaster, or migration. Jesus warns not to follow the example of the Pharisees who presented themselves publicly as law-abiding citizens but did not practice the covenant virtues (Matthew 23:3).

WEDNESDAY

Stand for Truth Woe to the ones called to criticize. They may risk anger and rejection. Both Jesus and the prophet Jeremiah were in situations that placed their lives in danger. Though most today don't face such frightening predicaments, we are still called to stand up for truth, identify injustice, and fulfill our responsibilities.

THURSDAY

Learn Responsibility Like the rich man denied the embrace of Abraham (Luke 16:19–31), we may seek a display that reaffirms the presence of a spiritual reality. The rich man is told that Moses and the prophets—the religious tradition—is all that is needed. The entire story revolves around the responsibilities that flow from the covenant that binds us to each other.

FRIDAY

Offer Reprieve Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers (Genesis 37), later helped his brothers escape famine. In Jesus' parable of a vineyard owner's son, tenant farmers kill the son, hoping to gain ownership of the vineyard (Luke 20:9–19). Jesus is clearly connected to these beloved sons: All were cherished by their fathers and destined to suffer. The Gospel recalls in verse 17, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." Both stories speak to the graciousness of our loving God.

SATURDAY

Choose Wisely The Prodigal Son parable (Luke 15:11–32) epitomizes the primary meaning of Lent. The younger son chooses selfish gratification, oblivious to the pain he might cause others. The dependable elder son is bitter when mercy is shown to someone else. The main character, the father, represents God: generous, forbearing, merciful, patient. We are invited to celebrate the renewal of life with our gracious God.

God's goodness toward us should be the motivation of our own kindness toward others.

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Believe in New Life What are we called to believe? Is it that a broken nation will be reconstituted? Is it that one who has died will be resuscitated? These “risings,” while extraordinary, don’t last. Lazarus will face physical death. We are called to believe in a resurrection that transforms and lasts. Our faith promises our own participation in resurrection and new life.

MONDAY

Pave the Way for Penitence When faced with a woman’s sin of adultery, Jesus does not exonerate her. His exhortation, “do not sin any more” (John 8:11) acknowledges that she is indeed guilty. He does not disdain the law, but neither does he condemn the sinner to death. He demonstrates God’s unbounded graciousness. Divine compassion paves the way for penitence.

TUESDAY

Look for Healing Venomous bites of serpents were punishment for ungrateful complaints of people delivered from oppression in Egypt. As a remedy, Moses erected a pole on which was affixed the bronze image of a vicious serpent. Those who looked on it recovered. Jesus relates the lifting up of the bronze serpent to his own suffering, which will take place on the cross. When he is lifted up, the people will recognize his true identity as the agent of their healing. Jesus heals.

WEDNESDAY

Live Out the Part Jews were proud to identify themselves as children of Abraham and were incensed when Jesus told them they were slaves to their own sinfulness (John 8:31–42). Today we may call unacceptable behavior an addiction, not sin for which we are culpable. We should ask: Are we like Abraham, or are we more like those who made the claim but did not live out the part?

THURSDAY

Know Your Family *Nostra Aetate* has made great strides toward mutual respect and cooperation between Jews and Christians. Still, many people today wrongly blame all Jews for Jesus’ suffering and death. During Lent we should remember that the Jewish people never stopped being children of Abraham (Romans 11:1).

FRIDAY

Set the Standard Jesus insists we forgive those who sin against us. Whenever we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we set the measure of our forgiveness of others as the standard for our being forgiven by God. Such a selfless attitude might be difficult, but it is a goal we should strive toward. Lent is a perfect time to reflect on Jesus’ attitude toward those who caused his suffering

SATURDAY

Witness through Mercy In Ezekiel 37:21–28, God proclaims his tender love and concern for Israel. The end of this passage states that the commitment of God to the people renews them and makes them holy. This refashioning of a sinful people into a holy people gives witness to the rest of the nations that God is holy. This means the holiness of God is manifested through tender mercy, not harsh judgment.

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Highlights of Holy Week

PALM SUNDAY

Follow Closely Are we willing to take up our cross and follow this Messiah, Jesus, a messiah who exhorts self-emptying rather than self-fulfillment, obedience rather than willfulness, openness to new insights rather than adherence to outdated concepts? Will we stand for truth regardless of the price it may require of us?

GOOD FRIDAY

Embark on a Journey These reflections in *Catholic Update* remind us that any penance we may have chosen for Lent should flow from grateful recognition of God’s compassion, rather than be undertaken to win God’s favor or ward off God’s fury. In response, may we recognize anew Jesus’ passion and death as the greatest demonstration of grace. Jesus’ willingness to give of himself is an unselfish gift. We have done nothing to deserve it.

HOLY THURSDAY

Commit to Follow Holy Thursday is traditionally associated with the institution of the Eucharist, but John 13:1–15 focuses on Jesus’ unselfish service to others by washing their feet. Do we understand what it means to follow Jesus? As we enter the Triduum, Jesus is presented to us as a self-emptying servant who tells us, “As I have done for you, you should also do” (John 13:15).

EASTER VIGIL

Bask in the Light The Easter candle represents the light of salvation that transforms the darkness of sin and death. This season we have seen that it is God’s graciousness that prompts us to change our lives, to repent of our sins, and to perform works of penance that will benefit others. This vigil is the culmination of our journey. When night passes, we will be able to bask in the light of God’s graciousness.

EASTER SUNDAY

Enter Faithfully We enter into the celebration of this great feast with faith. Our own unselfish openness to others, our genuine efforts at peace, and our willingness to forgive all testify to the world that Jesus rose from the dead and continues to live in us. Proof of the resurrection is not found in an empty tomb. Rather, it is seen in the committed lives of those who believe.

SOURCE: DAYBREAKS: DAILY REFLECTIONS FOR LENT AND EASTER BY DIANNE BERGANT, CSA (821615). TO ORDER, VISIT LIGUORI.ORG OR CALL 800-325-9521.



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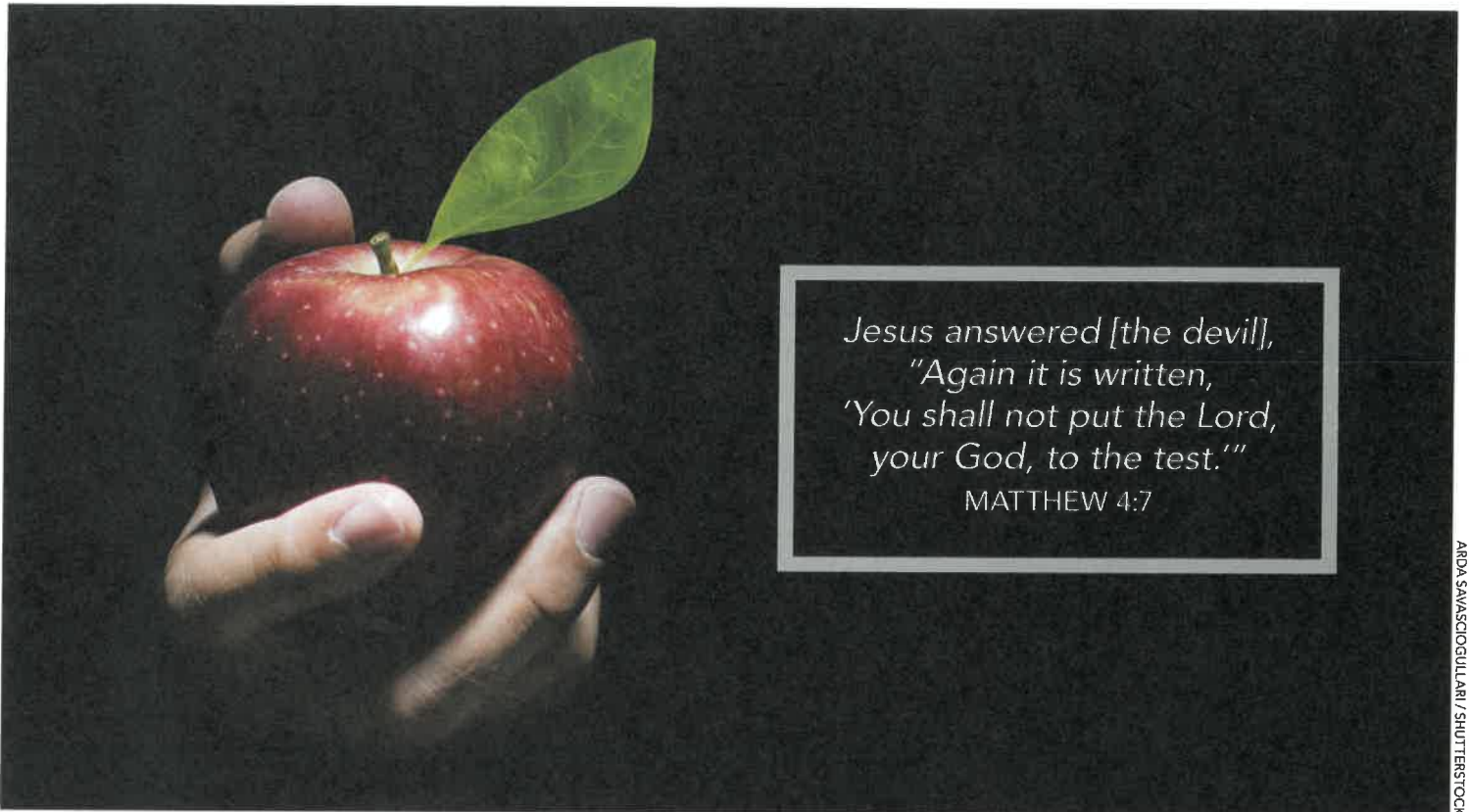
March 1, 2020

First Sunday of Lent (A)

Gn 2:7-9; 3:1-7

Rom 5:12-19 or 5:12, 17-19

Mt 4:1-11



Jesus answered [the devil],
"Again it is written,
'You shall not put the Lord,
your God, to the test.'"

MATTHEW 4:7

ARDA SAVASCIOGULARI / SHUTTERSTOCK

Try It! You'll Like It!

If only temptation was obvious, we might have a better chance of avoiding it. But sometimes it's so subtle. It often disguises itself as something rather attractive. This is precisely what happened in the Garden of Eden. Scripture says temptation takes on a living form—a serpent that convinces the woman that the fruit of the wisdom tree will make them "like gods, who know good and evil" (Genesis 3:5).

Who wouldn't jump at such a possibility? Actually, who hasn't already fallen into that trap—acting as if we are God, thinking we know everything or wishing to be in complete control? Our faith certainly encourages us to become more and more like God. What made that desire wrong was the way Adam and Eve sought to become like gods in their own way, not God's way.

The Gospel passage tells us that Jesus also was tempted. Who doubts that Jesus wanted to be successful in his ministry? But what would he do to ensure success? Would he use divine power to attract a following? No! Would he call upon God to protect him from misunderstanding, rejection, even physical harm? No! Would he bargain with the devil, who obviously exercised power over many people? No! That was not the way he would be the Messiah. Unlike the couple in the Garden, Jesus recognized what was wrong even when it was disguised as something good. How good are we at recognizing temptation in our lives?

—Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

FOR Reflection

- ★ In what ways does temptation sometimes trick you?
- ★ What can you do so you won't be tricked?

Dear Padre,

Is gambling a sin?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* mentions gambling in the context of “temperance” to moderate attachment to worldly goods, “justice” to render to our neighbor what is due, and “solidarity in accordance with the golden rule” (CCC 2407). “Games of chance (card games, etc.) or wagers are not in themselves contrary to justice. They become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others. The passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement. Unfair wagers and cheating at games constitute grave matter...” (CCC 2413).

Gambling, therefore, is morally neutral. When properly controlled, it can be a form of recreation for some. However, it becomes an enslavement when obsessive gamblers neglect their families or jobs, risk financial security, and compromise their responsibilities to self, others, and God. The allure of winning and the desire to win even more—along with venues that provide easy gambling credit and other incentives—often make it harder for people to know their limits. Consequently, a severe gambling addiction can lead and has led to stealing to pay debts, divorce, job loss, despair, and suicide.

No wonder St. Augustine cautioned, “The devil invented gambling.” Even if Satan didn’t invent it, he’ll gladly take credit for it when gambling becomes a means to his ends. In so many words, those who win large amounts from lotteries and games of chance frequently warn, “All that glitters isn’t gold.” Despite its enticements, gambling ultimately fails to satisfy the human heart’s longing for meaning and fulfillment.

—Fr. Byron Miller, CSSR | Sundaybulletin@Liguori.org



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A WORD FROM *Pope Francis*

There are three temptations of Christ....First, wealth: seizing hold of goods destined for all and using them only for “my own people.” That is, taking “bread” based on the toil of others or even at the expense of their very lives. That wealth tastes of pain, bitterness, and suffering.

—HOMILY IN MEXICO, FEBRUARY 14, 2016

Calendar

Monday

MARCH 2

Lenten Weekday

Lv 19:1–2, 11–18

Mt 25:31–46

Tuesday

MARCH 3

Lenten Weekday

Is 55:10–11

Mt 6:7–15

Wednesday

MARCH 4

Lenten Weekday

Jon 3:1–10

Lk 11:29–32

Thursday

MARCH 5

Lenten Weekday

Est C:12, 14–16,

23–25

Mt 7:7–12

Friday

MARCH 6

Lenten Weekday

Ez 18:21–28

Mt 5:20–26

Saturday

MARCH 7

Lenten Weekday

Dt 26:16–19

Mt 5:43–48

Sunday

MARCH 8

Second Sunday

of Lent

Gn 12:1–4a

2 Tm 1:8b–10

Mt 17:1–9